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# THE NATION'S GREAT UNRECOGNIZED RESOURCE: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF AMERICANS 55+

The Commonwealth Fund
Americans Over 55 At Work Program

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# New Portrait of the Contributions of Americans 55+

- **The Commonwealth Fund, ICF Incorporated, and the University of Massachusetts at Boston Gerontology Institute developed a survey to provide new data on the activities of Americans age 55 and older.**
- **The survey was conducted by Louis Harris and Associates.**
- **The survey sample of 2,999 Americans age 55 and older is representative of the population of the U.S. age 55 and older who do not live in institutions and are not in the military (= 52.4 million people).**

## U.S. Population Age 55+ in 1990

| Total Population | 52.4 million |
|---|---|
| Women | 57.0% |
| Men | 43.0% |
| 55-64 | 40.4% |
| 65-74 | 34.6% |
| 75 and Older | 25.0% |

**Source: 1990 Census of Population**

## Refuting Stereotypes of Americans 55+

| | Age 55-64 | Age 65-74 | Age 75+ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Excellent or good health | 71% | 62% | 52% |
| Increasing importance of helping other people | 66% | 59% | 51% |
| Very satisfied with life now | 61% | 63% | 59% |

# WORK BEHAVIOR OF AMERICANS 55+

# Employment Status of Americans 55+

- **Those working:**
  - **Full Time:** **9.9 million**
  - **Part Time:** **4.4 million**
- **Those not working:** **38.1 million**
- **Of which:**
  - **Those not wanting to work:** **26.4 million**
  - **Those unable to work:** **6.3 million**
  - **Those willing and able to work:** **5.4 million**

# DIRECT VOLUNTEER CARE TO FAMILIES AND NEIGHBORS

# Volunteers Providing Direct Care

- 15.1 million Americans age 55 and older provide direct volunteer care to sick or disabled family members, friends, or neighbors.

- Those receiving assistance include:

| | Number | Typical amount each week |
|---|---|---|
| -- Spouses | 3.4 million | 20 hours |
| -- Parents | 3.1 million | 6 hours |
| -- Other relatives | 4.6 million | 5 hours |
| -- Friends and neighbors | 5.2 million | 3 hours |
| | 16.3 million | |

- The total amount of direct volunteer care to the sick or disabled is equivalent to the hours of 2.7 million full-time workers.

## Helpers to Parents, Spouses, Other Relatives, and Friends and Neighbors

- **29% of all women age 55 and older**
  **28% of all men age 55 and older**

- **33% of those age 55-64**
  **29% of those age 65-74**
  **22% of those age 75+**

- **The typical caregiver spends 5 hours per week. 2.4 million caregivers spend 18 or more hours per week.**

## Both Men and Women Provide Direct Care

| Recipients | Male Providers | Female Providers |
|---|---|---|
| 3.4 million Spouses | 1.6 million | 1.8 million |
| 0.6 million Fathers | 0.3 million | 0.3 million |
| 2.5 million Mothers | 0.9 million | 1.6 million |
| 5.2 million Friends or Neighbors | 2.1 million | 3.1 million |

## Helping Younger Generations

- **22.6 million Americans age 55 and older provide direct help to children or grandchildren/great grandchildren.**

- **Those receiving assistance include:**

| | Number | Typical amount each week |
|---|---|---|
| -- Children | 17.6 million | 5 hours |
| -- Grandchildren/great grandchildren | 14.2 million | 8 hours |

- **The total amount of help to children and grandchildren is equivalent to the hours of 4.4 million full-time workers.**

## Helpers to Children And Grandchildren

- **17.6 million older Americans assist their children.**
  - -- **3.4 million provide help for 18 or more hours per week.**
  - -- **This assistance is equivalent to 1.9 million full-time workers.**
- **14.2 million older Americans with grandchildren or great grandchildren help with their care.**
  - -- **3.4 million provide help for 18 or more hours per week and 1.6 million for 35 or more hours per week.**
  - -- **This assistance is equivalent to 2.5 million full-time workers.**

## Helpers to Children And Grandchildren
(continued)

- 52% of all women age 55 and older who have children or grandchildren
  50% of all men
- 64% of those age 55-64 who have children or grandchildren
  52% of those age 65-74
  25% of those age 75+
- Helpers are healthier, more active in religious activities, and happier with life than those who do not help.
- Women typically provide 9 hours of assistance each week. Men provide 7 hours.

## Providing Financial Assistance to Younger Generations

- **9.3 million older Americans provide a sizable part of the household income of their children or grandchildren.**
- **2.2 million older Americans receive a sizable part of their household income from their children or grandchildren.**

# VOLUNTEERING THROUGH ORGANIZATIONS

## Volunteers Through Organizations

- 13.7 million Americans age 55 and older (26% of all)
- 27% of all 29.9 million women age 55 and older
  25% of all 22.5 million men age 55 and older
- 28% of those age 55-64
  26% of those age 65-74
  23% of those age 75+
- The typical volunteer serves 4 hours per week (men: 4 hours per week; women: 4 hours per week).
- 1.0 million older Americans contribute 18 or more hours per week, and 243,000 serve 35 or more hours per week.
- 4.7 million volunteers also do paid work.
- 53% of volunteers are active in religious activities.

## Which Organizations

- **Religious:** 49%
- **Hospital, Nursing Home, Hospice:** 12%
- **Service Organization:** 9%
- **Senior Citizen Center:** 6%
- **About four in ten volunteers serve more than one organization.**

## Potential Volunteers

- 6 million Americans age 55 and older are willing and able to volunteer but do not currently.
- 10% of all women age 55 and older -- 2.9 million people
  14% of all men age 55 and older -- 3.1 million people
- 15% of those age 55-64 -- 3.2 million people
  12% of those age 65-74 -- 2.2 million people
  4% of those age 75+ -- 0.5 million people
- They are less well educated and less active in religious activities than current volunteers.
- One-third also work.

## Volunteering Through Organizations

- **Current volunteering through organizations: equivalent to the hours of 1,100,000 full-time workers.**
- **Willing and able to volunteer: equivalent to an additional 500,000 full-time workers.**

# THE GREAT RESOURCE

## The Great Resource

- **37.9 million Americans age 55 and older -- more than 70% -- are actively engaged in helping American society:**
  - **-- 14.3 million are in the paid labor force.**
  - **-- 30.2 million provide direct volunteer care to families and neighbors.**
  - **-- 13.7 million volunteer through organizations.**

## The Great Resource
## (continued)

- **Contributing:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| -- | 35+ hours/week: | 15.3 million = 29% |
| -- | 18 to 34 hours/week: | 6.6 million = 13% |
| -- | 8 to 17 hours/week: | 5.9 million = 11% |
| -- | 1 to 7 hours/week: | 10.1 million = 19% |
| | | 72% |

## The Value of Helping American Society

- **The value of their contribution is enormous:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| -- | **Paid employment:** | **11.9 million full-time equivalent workers** |
| -- | **Caregiving:** | **7.1 million** |
| -- | **Volunteering:** | **1.1 million** |
| | | **20.1 million** |

## The Value of Helping American Society (continued)

- **The untapped potential of older Americans also is significant:**
  - **Willing and Able to Work: 1.2 million full-time equivalent workers**
  - **Willing and Able to Volunteer: 0.5 million**

## Contributions by Those 75+

- **6.3 million Americans age 75 and older -- nearly one-half of all -- are actively engaged in helping American society:**
  - **-- 23% volunteer through organizations.**
  - **-- 22% give care to the sick or disabled.**
  - **-- 19% help younger generations.**
  - **-- 4% are in paid employment.**

## Glad To Be Contributors

- **86 percent of older Americans who assist their children's families with time or money are pleased and satisfied to do so.**
- **76 percent of those who provide care to the sick or disabled receive a great deal of satisfaction from doing so.**
- **90 percent of the volunteers believe that their work contributes a good deal to their organization.**

## The Contributions of Americans 55+

- Massive
- Growing
- Vital
- Unrecognized